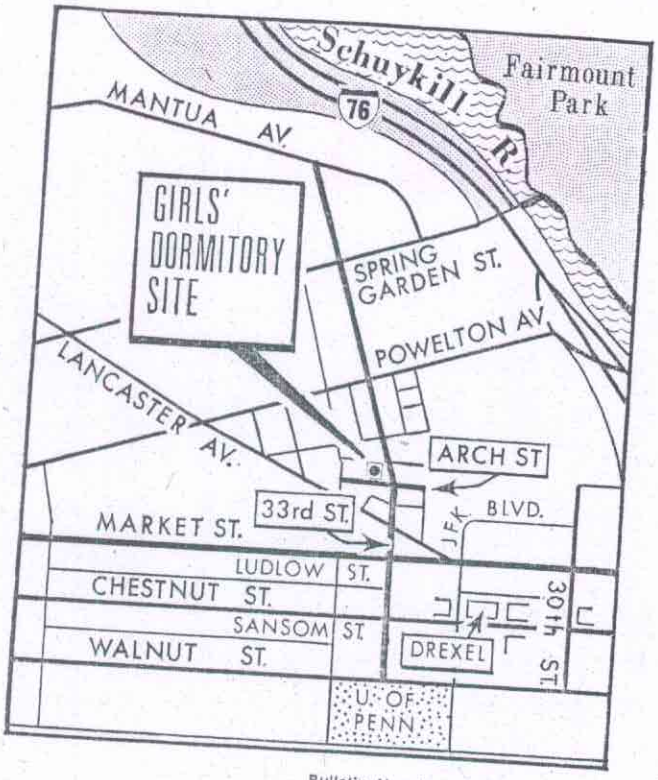
Background of Powelton Dispute

On Nov. 8 last year, a group of Powelton Village residents hauled a dilapidated swing onto a vacant lot at 33d and Arch st. and christened the lot an "instant community park."

It was an action taken in opposition to Drexel University's plan to build a dormitory on the site.

Dr. Gerald Goldin, a University of Pennsylvania physics teacher, said the community objected to Drexel's expansion into the area at the cost of their homes.

He said he was a member of the East Powelton Concerned Residents.



Bulletin Map by Donald De Maio

Up to Surface

It was the first time the EPCR had surfaced publicly in its battle with Drexel, the Redevelopment Authority, the police and city officialdom.

Since then its members have participated in sit-ins, demonstrations, fence-busting forays and legal actions. The most recent was a court hearing two weeks ago at which it was testified that residents "brought babies and set them on the ground" where construction work was underway.

Sometime during the month following the "instant park" episode, a wire mesh fence was erected around the 33d and Arch st. construction site.

On the night of Dec. 3, members of EPCR and other groups pulled down the fence.

On Dec. 6, 60 Powelton residents staged a sit-in at Drexel's Activities Center on Chestnut st. between 32d and 33d sts. Two days later, Judge Leo Weinrott issued a temporary injunction barring sit-ins at Drexel.

The EPCR was one of five groups named as defendants.

On Dec. 18, State Supreme Court Judge Herbert B. Cohen vacated the injunction. His ruling was sought by Community Legal Services, Inc., which represented the defendants.

It was not until Jan. 29 that the next demonstration occurred, however. On that date, about 200 persons moved into Drexel's administration building and promised to stay there until the university stopped demolition of homes in the area.

Drexel President William Hagerty told them that construction of the $4 million women's dormitory and other building projects would continue despite the protests.

More Sit-Ins

The sit-in ended after three days with an agreement that demonstrators and the university would start a series of talks. Upshot of the talks was that the dormitory construction would continue but other building projects in the area would be stopped "indefinitely."

Since then there have been sporadic sit-ins and demonstrations at various Drexel projects, including the dormitory.

On May 23, members of EPCR took over a building at 3312 Race st. once occupied by a casket company. The redevelopment authority had condemned it. The invaders said it would be used as a community center.

On June 29, members of EPCR halted demolition of three homes on Lancaster av. between 33d and 34th where Drexel plans to build a $7.6 million gymnasium. They climbed on cranes and stood in front of bulldozers.

On July 9, 16 Powelton residents staged a 2½ hour sit-in in the offices of Nolen Swinburne & Associates, 17th and Sansom sts., architects designing the Drexel structures.

One of the demonstrators was Kenneth Moberg, an EPCR member who said the occupation was by the Coalition of Community Groups. The purpose, he said, was to persuade the firm to "stop planning the destruction of the Drexel Community."

Members of the East Powelton Concerned Residents say they oppose Drexel's expansion plan because it deprives both blacks and whites of housing in an area where housing is sorely needed.

They say many of the homes already destroyed were in good condition. They also contend that Drexel is acting in a heavy-handed way in matters that should be decided by the entire community.